

# **Atlantic Exchange:**

## **Case Studies of Housing and Community Redevelopment in the United States and the United Kingdom**

**Diane K. Levy (Urban Institute), Harris Beider (Institute of Community Cohesion), Susan Popkin,  
and David Price (Urban Institute)**

**With**

**Aur lie Broeckerhoff (Institute of Community Cohesion)**

**February 2010**

**Report to the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and the Birmingham City  
Council**



*Prepared by:*

**The Urban Institute**

2100 M Street, NW • Washington, DC 20037



## **Acknowledgements**

We would like to thank the MacArthur Foundation, Herman Brewer and Spruiell White in particular, and the Birmingham City Council, especially Councillor Alan Rudge and Dr. Mashuq Ally, for funding this project. While we met with more people than we can name, we would like to extend special thanks to Felicia Dawson and her colleagues from The Community Builders at Oakwood Shores, and Veronica Coatham from the Castle Vale Community Housing Association. Ms. Dawson and Coatham went above and beyond in arranging meetings, interviews, and sharing their own experiences with our group. Ms. Kellie O'Connell-Miller from the Chicago Housing Authority arranged tours of sites in Chicago. David Price of the Urban Institute and Aurélie Broeckerhoff of the Institute of Community Cohesion expertly organized the study trips in addition to participating in the site visits. Finally, we thank the community residents, leaders, housing management and community development staff, and other people who kindly offered their time and insights to help us understand the Oakwood Shores and Castle Vale communities, past and present.

## I. Introduction

Providers of publicly subsidized housing in both the United States and the United Kingdom have partnered with private sector entities to provide affordable housing for a number of years now. Though the policy contexts differ considerably between the two countries, as discussed in our first report, *Community Revitalization in the United States and the United Kingdom*, the problems that housing and community redevelopment efforts seek to address are similar, as are the approaches taken to address them.

Both countries are attempting to address a range of problems, including deteriorating housing stock, lack of services and amenities, crime, and resident populations with high rates of unemployment, dropping out of school, and single parenthood. In the United States, the problems are compounded by the long history of racial segregation and discrimination—the majority of the households in communities targeted for redevelopment are African-American or Hispanic. U.S. cities have used the HOPE VI program to transform some of their most troubled communities—distressed public housing—into mixed-income developments intended both to attract higher-income households and spur economic development.

The United Kingdom is facing rapid demographic changes marked by a growing immigrant population. The government is seeking to avoid creating the kinds of racial and economic isolation seen in the United States, and has developed a model similar to HOPE VI that will transform its assisted housing into mixed-income, mixed-tenure communities. The New Deal for Communities (NDC) program, the focus of the U.K. exchange in Phase I of this project, is the centerpiece of the United Kingdom's effort to shift social housing to the private, nonprofit sector. Much like HOPE VI program, the NDC process involves rebuilding large tracts of once-publicly owned properties into more diverse communities with greater privatization of management of rental units and eventually higher levels of homeownership. Other initiatives share NDC's goals, such as Housing Action Trusts (HAT), which were enabled by the Housing Act of 1988 to "regenerate some of the most deprived local authority estates in England."<sup>1</sup> HATs are managed by a board comprised of estate residents and members of the local authority. Objectives are to "repair and improve [HAT] housing; to manage their housing effectively; to encourage diversity of tenure; and to improve the social, environmental and living conditions of their areas."

To examine the respective housing and community revitalization approaches and see what lessons might be drawn from them, a team of researchers from the United States and United Kingdom organized a series of community visits. In this report, we build on the first phase of our comparative study by focusing on two cities, Birmingham in England and Chicago in the United States, and one housing development in each city. We examine the challenges and success of two community redevelopment initiatives,

place both case studies in the context of larger citywide and national redevelopment policies, and consider lessons that can be drawn from these cases for similar efforts elsewhere.

For the second phase of the exchange, supported by the MacArthur Foundation in the United States and the Birmingham City Council in the United Kingdom, the research team conducted case studies of two redevelopments—Castle Vale in Birmingham<sup>2</sup> and Oakwood Shores in Chicago.<sup>3</sup> Through interviews and focus-group discussions with housing management staff, service providers, city staff, and residents of each community, we examined the physical, managerial, and demographic changes in the target communities. We also explored issues of place identity, community cohesion, and the communities' place in city-level initiatives. Study teams also participated in seminars with community and local government leaders, academics, and others to discuss neighborhood change in the two cities.

Running through the interviews and seminars were themes of transformation, contestation and integration. The two communities we visited have been transformed physically and symbolically. The changes have led, in some instances, to contestations over the changes themselves, who beneficiaries of change are believed to be, and identities of place. Both transformation and contestation are affected by the degree of integration—whether and how places can be integrated into the broader fabric of the cities and whether and how people from different economic classes, racial or ethnic groups, or community-tenure cohorts integrate over time into a “community” and form well-connected neighborhoods.

#### *Organization of the report*

We present the two case studies sequentially, beginning with Castle Vale in Birmingham. Each study begins with an overview of the community and the changes that have taken place as part of revitalization efforts. We then examine emergent issues related to redevelopment and community building. In the last section, we take a step back from the particulars of each place to explore emergent issues before concluding the report with lessons for policy and practice.

## **II. Castle Vale**

### **Overview of Redevelopment**

The Castle Vale housing estate is located in northeast Birmingham, near the city's edge. Birmingham, situated in the West Midlands, is the second largest city in England. A major industrial center, the city was heavily bombed during World War II. After the War, the government funded the construction of a number of large housing tracts, or *estates*, were built. Additional estates, including Castle Vale, also were built as part of the slum clearance programs of the 1960s, replacing housing that was in very poor condition and much of it lacked indoor plumbing.

Construction of Castle Vale began in 1965 on property that had been home to the Castle Bromwich Aerodrome where Spitfire planes were built and tested during World War II. Building was completed in 1969. Many of the first residents of the new community relocated from Nechells and Aston—two inner-city neighborhoods targeted for clearance. The residents at that time were predominantly white and working class. Focus group participants commented that moving from Aston to Castle Vale was considered a step up in terms of housing quality.

When it was completed, Castle Vale had more than 5,000 housing units and nearly 20,000 residents (Neighborhood Plan brochure) on 1.5 square miles. The buildings ranged in type from detached bungalows, two-story flats, flats placed over garages, and high-rise "tower blocks." A portion of the housing was built for sale though the majority of units were rentals. Initially, the 34 tower blocks, most of which were clustered in two areas on the estate, housed the majority of estate residents. Given the estate's location, roughly six miles from Birmingham's central business district, and its street pattern that offered limited entry and egress, Castle Vale was, and to a degree remains, an isolated and nearly self-contained community with schools, health clinics, pubs, parks, and shopping centers, all on site.

Castle Vale started to decline in the 1970s; a range of factors contributed to its problems. First, much of the housing fell into disrepair due to reduced investment from local authorities and poor housing management. There was overcrowding as well with many of the two-bedroom apartments in the tower blocks housing six or seven people. Second, the economic slump in the 1970s and 1980s, which increased unemployment throughout the country, hit Castle Vale particularly hard and the unemployment rate reached 26 percent. Third, businesses in the shopping center proved unsustainable because they failed to draw customers from beyond the immediate community. With these problems, schools also began to fail and enrollment declined as students posted some of the lowest exam results in the city. The health status of many residents was poor and the health center was too small to serve the community well. These problems

were compounded by increased levels of drugs, crime, and other antisocial behavior. The estate's six pubs were associated with public drunkenness and fights, and the long, straight roads originally designed to test the Spitfire planes were often used as racetracks and places for joyrides. Speeding cars were not the only vehicular-related concern—as one resident commented during a focus group, 'if your car was stolen in Birmingham, you knew it would be dumped and burned in Castle Vale.' By 1993, the estate's population had dropped to approximately 11,000 people.

It was in this context that the Castle Vale Housing Action Trust (HAT) was established in 1993 to lead the physical redevelopment of the area. Once approved by resident vote, the HAT was able to remove the estate from local council authority ownership and access significant investments from the national government. The regeneration of the estate under HAT was to have been completed in seven years, but grew to a 12-year, £270 million effort.

HAT demolished 32 of the 34 tower blocks, 27 two-story flats, and 114 bungalows, and renovated remaining units. The change was dramatic, transforming Castle Vale from a community of long stretches of high-rise buildings to a low-rise estate. During the period of demolitions, residents were offered the choice to move to other council housing off-site or to relocate on-site while waiting for a renovated unit.

The Castle Vale HAT also involved significant rehabilitation of park and retail spaces, including creating a new park in the center of the estate. Smaller park spaces, including sports facilities, were created in other areas of Castle Vale as well. More than £35 million was invested to redevelop a new retail area, as well as a new supermarket, a college, a police station, and a library. In the focus groups, residents identified a number of additional businesses, service offerings, and entertainment options that have been provided or improved as a result of HAT, such as hairdressers, a "chip shop," two health centers, schools, a soccer stadium, swimming pool, a social club, and social service center. As one resident said, the estate has "everything you need."



Some new housing at Castle Vale

Most building activities were completed by 2005—the end of the 12-year regeneration period. As HAT was ending, community members voted to transfer the estate to the

resident-lead Castle Vale Community Housing Association (CVCHA) which was established in 1996 to manage the new housing built under HAT. A number of tenants



The research team touring new housing with modern architecture at Castle Vale

and homeowners in existing housing chose to come under CVCHA as well. In addition to managing the estate, CVCHA provides consultant services to other communities taking on significant community change initiatives. The Association also spun off Castle Vale Community Regeneration Services (CVCRS) to deliver a range of community and social services on the estate.

Today, Castle Vale has 2,700 units of social housing, 2,000 owner-occupied units, and 18 council units. According to the housing manager for the estate, the vast majority of the approximately 9,500

residents are white British (88 percent) with only about 8 percent of the residents identifying as black and minority ethnic (BME). Demographics are changing slowly; during the previous year, management rented a quarter of the 132 units leased to BME households. The average age of tenants is 30, with the largest age group being that of people between 20 and 59 years of age. A third of residents are 19 years old or younger. The remaining quarter of the residents are older than 60. Most households are headed by women.

According to CVCHA staff, even with the regeneration, the Castle Vale and the surrounding area still is among the poorest areas of England. The community still identifies problems that need to be addressed, including underage drinking, unsupervised children, and problems with gangs and youth throwing stones. Nevertheless, most indicators of community health have improved significantly. Staff said unemployment dropped from 26 percent in 1993 to 5 percent in 2005, though it is on the rise again, reaching 8 percent in spring 2009. The worklessness rate, however, was 27 percent.<sup>4</sup> Life expectancy has improved, although it is still two years below the national average. There are no longer problems with stolen cars and, according to residents, the crime rate is low compared to surrounding areas.

### **Emergent Issues**

Changes in management and to the physical community have permeated myriad aspects of life on Castle Vale. Of particular interest are changes in management and community leadership, resident services, safety, and place identity and changing norms.

## Management and Community Leadership

Since the shift from City Council to housing association control, the management of Castle Vale estate has strived for a more engaged and participatory community leadership model. This model is made easier because while many other estates are managed by a housing association with a portfolio of properties, this one development is the sole focus of Castle Vale's Community Housing Association. CVCHA staff chose to include *community engagement* as one of their guiding principles in managing the estate.

This focus is reflected in the fact that residents make up the majority of the managing board. Respondents believe this arrangement benefits the community because these board members have a personal stake in the success of the estate. More residents are engaged through the neighborhood associations. Castle Vale has 14 neighborhoods, each of which has its own association and budget. These groups tend to focus on issues such as litter, grass maintenance, noise complaints, anti-social behavior, and so on. Staff also talked about efforts to build leadership among community youth, both to offer positive engagement opportunities and to gain youth input, but also to develop future leadership.

During interviews and discussions with staff and residents, two issues related to management and community engagement came to the fore—who becomes involved in community leadership and how to attract new and effective leaders over time. Many respondents spoke about the fact that many of the community leaders are older residents likely because they have more time than younger adults who work and have children at home. Another contributing factor is that those on the board choose to serve several terms rather than turn over the seats more often. One board member commented that there are tenant members who have served nearly 14 years. Discussion was under way at the time of the site visit to shorten terms as a way to draw other residents into leadership positions.

Respondents said that there are some among the resident leaders who recognize a need to increase ethnic diversity among board members. Because longer-term residents are white and leaders tend to be older members of the estate, most people in leadership positions are white. Some residents also raised the issue of outsider status that can affect any newer resident, white or BME, saying that it can be difficult for people who move to the estate from other areas to become involved in the community regardless of race. The overall success of the regeneration in addressing community problems presents yet another challenge for attracting new leadership. Respondents talked about how difficult it can be to engage residents and build interest in serving on the board when there are no big issues left on the table. Several respondents commented that it



was easier to get and keep more residents involved in the past when the estate was facing serious problems. Residents and staff said that today, attendance at public meetings varies considerably based on the agenda items. They spoke of a degree of complacency that has settled in now that major regeneration activities have concluded.

Resident involvement also can be affected by people's interest and willingness to engage with the details of running a business. CVCHA staff talked about the difference of opinion among people as to whether resident board members' primary responsibility is to represent resident concerns or to fulfill governance and scrutiny duties. In short, do resident board members primarily represent the community or run the business. Staff have found that resident leaders have more interest in the former, though running the business also is an important part of the position.

An additional management concern raised by staff was community sustainability in terms of properties and finances. Staff talked about the challenge of maintaining a mixed-tenure estate, specifically how the neighborhoods and the estate managers can deal effectively with private owners. For example, some of the privately-owned housing units are not maintained to community standards. Staff also raised concerns about the longer-term sustainability of properties and services under financially strained circumstances. The estate is partially self-sustaining from rent payments, but staff said the estate's endowment fund is down and local funding sources might not always be reliable. Staff asked where they will be able to find funds if and when it becomes necessary to do so. The current economic crisis makes these worries even more germane.

### **Resident Services and Activities**

A broad array of on-site services and activities are available to residents of Castle Vale through multiple delivery sites. The Castle Vale Community Regeneration Services, a community-based service organization, provides social and occupational services out of the community center located in the central part of the Vale. An offshoot of the community center, the Sanctuary, is the locus of many services and activities for youth and adults. The Sanctuary is located nearer one edge of the estate; the Astral Youth Center is nearer the edge of another section of the community.

The services and activities, financed in part from rent payments, are geared toward benefiting both individuals and the community as a whole. Two types of services highlighted during the site visit provide examples. A range of employment-specific



The Sanctuary at Castle Vale

services are offered to residents to help people improve their own circumstances as well as to address what staff referred to as the long-existing “culture of unemployment” in the community. As already mentioned, unemployment decreased significantly on the estate to a level that was below the city average (6 percent at the end of HAT compared to a city average of 8 percent) and well below the rate for the ward within which Castle Vale sits (15 percent). Because unemployment was high in the past and because it was starting to increase again even before the broader economic downturn, CVCHA identified employment as a priority area for service provision. On-site services include programs that provide job training and employment support for youth and adults, and help connect residents with jobs. CVCHA and service staff said that working to increase the employment rate is important not only for the individuals involved (financially and in terms of mental health), but because of the long-term negative impact of unemployment on safety and crime.

Programs and services targeted to youth also serve a dual purpose. During an interview, the lead outreach youth worker, who works out of the Sanctuary with his staff, talked about the need to help children and youth raise their educational and employment aspirations. Raising aspirations is an underlying goal of the various clubs and activities, with the hope that the youth will have a more financially successful life than that of many of their parents. The lead worker described working hard to engage youth from across the Vale, and said that it can be difficult to attract youth who do not live in relatively close proximity to the Sanctuary. Though we did not meet staff from the Astral Youth Center, it is likely the same would be true there as well.

In addition to the goal of raising aspirations, youth-oriented services also are intended to prevent and reduce antisocial behavior (ASB), such as bullying, underage drinking and petty crime. There is considerable concern in Birmingham and elsewhere in Britain with ASB, in part out of concern that ASB can lead to more serious criminal activities. On the Vale, police have become involved with a range of youth activities to help steer youth toward positive activities, such as boxing classes and swimming lessons

### **Crime and Safety**

One of the biggest benefits of the regeneration has been the reduction in crime. During focus groups residents talked about the Vale being safe now and said that crime had been cut in half from what it was. Police interviewed during the site visit said crime fell 30 percent between 2003 and 2006 and is now “exceptionally low.” They also reported a 6 percent increase in crime recently (as of the site visit). Regardless of actual numbers, all respondents agreed that the estate was a much safer community now than it was in the past.

Residents, staff and police offered two primary causes for the reduction in crime—changes in police activities and the regeneration itself. Police, by their own accounts and those of community stakeholders, have improved communication with residents through shifting to a community policing approach. They have made efforts to build trust and positive relationships with adults and youth, and are particularly proud of and noted for the latter. The police we spoke to said they would like additional funds for youth engagement efforts, especially to provide safe evening activities. Residents credit police for their efforts to reduce drug trafficking on the estate and for their weekly visits with “priority offenders.”

Regeneration involved demolishing most of the tower blocks, which had become sites of numerous problems. Respondents attribute the establishment of neighborhood associations across the estate to supporting involvement and a sense of ownership among more residents as well as providing opportunities for people to get to know their neighbors. Residents in focus groups talked about people being “protective of the environment” and youth having more respect for the estate itself since regeneration. In addition, some residents serve as community wardens who serve as liaisons with police. The wardens might help address ASB or other issues but also have access to closed-circuit television monitors they can use to track problems and provide real-time information to the authorities. The wardens, about 35 in number, were described by a board member as “important for the sustainability of changes.” It is noteworthy that a portion of rent revenues is earmarked for security-related expenses.

Interestingly, CVCHA staff said that the reduction in crime was not due to permanent relocation of trouble-prone residents, though the police interviewed said that some of the relocated households had been among that group. Staff and police agreed that some people who presented the biggest problems still live on the Vale.

Despite the improvements in safety overall, some problems remain. Staff, residents and police talked about drinking and alcohol-related issues, people being loud and aggressive, youth throwing stones at houses and other properties, and graffiti—all of which fall under the category of ASB. Police also said that youth know where the CCTV cameras are located and congregate out of the camera’s range of vision. Usually, the youth are gathering near places that sell alcohol. Police respondents said that gangs are not much of a problem on the Vale. They also said that hate crimes tend not to be reported, though they have had reports occasionally from CVCHA of such crimes. It was unclear during the visit whether hate crimes occur more than are reported or occur infrequently.

## Place Identity and Cohesion

Castle Vale was described by some of the people we met as a somewhat insular estate where many people have lived most of their lives and, though very happy for the improvements brought about by regeneration, would like the community, in the sense of who lives there, to stay much as it has been. What it has been and remains is a predominantly white, working-class and poor community located at the edge of a city described as *hyperdiverse*, with large and growing populations of black Caribbeans and Southeast Asians, particularly Pakistanis.<sup>5</sup> Resident demographics on Castle Vale are changing, though very slowly. The director of Community Regeneration said the estate population was 12 percent BME, now compared to less than one percent before regeneration started.



A Castle Vale staff member discussing the community

The very low turnover rate is partly responsible for the slow rate at which racial and ethnic diversity is increasing. According to CVCHA staff, most families live on the estate for the long-term and are disappointed that not all children will be able to remain once they form their own households because of the low vacancy rate. Another reason staff and residents point to to explain the minimal diversity, however, is the reputation Castle Vale has for being an unwelcoming place for BMEs. One staff person told of prospective tenants turning down housing on the Vale out of fear of racism.

Stories shared by staff and residents during the site visit ranged from BME residents not feeling as though they fully fit into the community even after living there for years to experiencing name-calling to having stones thrown at homes of BME residents. As one of the youth workers said, while these actions are not widespread, “there is an overtone” on the estate. As unsettling as these types of actions can be, the situation has improved over time. Staff reported that there were two harassment incidents eight years ago that resulted in the offending residents’ evictions. And about 15 years ago, a BME family that was placed on the estate by the city council was harassed seriously enough that staff at the time were concerned for their safety. The family was moved off the estate after 24 hours. The board member who talked about this incident said that while she hopes such a thing would not happen again, she was not sure it was impossible.

Relations among Castle Vale residents take place in a context of increasing racial and ethnic diversity in the city and the country and an increasing sense of economic and political fears and frustrations among white, working-class citizens. As the number of immigrants as well as asylum seekers has increased, there has been growing support for positions pushed by groups and political parties such as the British Nationalist Party (BNP). As explained by a member of the CVCRS staff, if BME people or other outsiders move in, some white community members would see them as “taking what is rightfully ours.” She went on to say that recently a group of asylum seekers was interested in moving to Castle Vale, but tenants did not like the idea and the moves did not occur.

The problem some people have with immigrants and asylum seekers is not directed toward all nonwhite groups with equal measure. Youth staff spoke of the nuances of race relations, saying race-related problems were more likely to occur between whites and Asians than whites and blacks, or at least black Caribbeans. Caribbean immigrants arrived in the area earlier and are viewed as less dissimilar to whites than are the more recent immigrants.

Diversity and relations among residents on the Vale are concerns for staff and board members of the estate because increasing equality and diversity is a goal for the community. Indeed, the board has diversity targets to bring the estate’s resident base in line with the rest of the city. City government itself also promotes diversity through its department of Equalities and Human Resources.

According to staff, CVCHA has made a point to hire BME staff as a way to serve as a role model to residents and counteract negative images of BME persons provided by the tabloids. The board, however, as of yet has no BME members, which was said to make the promotion of diversity more of a struggle. Board members also have their own struggles. One person told us she has heard racist views expressed at the board level. We also were told that the diversity training for the board focused on a range of diversity types, including sexual orientation, but not on race—a topic that was “generally avoided.” Castle Vale was described by a staff member as a community that is “not ready to deal with any major change in the demographic profile.”

Though how best to promote diversity and inclusion might not always be clear, staff keep working on it. CVCHA and Youth staff and other community members mentioned a range of efforts meant to promote cohesion and diversity and reduce racial tensions on the estate, including CVCHA hiring more BME employees, the board discussing how to increase the diversity of members, and CVCHA, Youth staff and other on-site groups offering cultural activities, such as cooking classes and festivals with cultural themes. Management staff said they are not, however, recruiting BME households to live on the Vale.

Racial diversity and community tenure were key issues people discussed related to community cohesion though not the only ones. Both CVCRS and Youth staff spoke of generational issues and efforts geared toward building positive relations between youth and older residents. Also noted were tensions between renters and homeowners. Initially, renters and homeowners had their own organizations on Castle Vale. In 1996 CVCRS staff formed the Tenants and Residents Alliance to bridge this divide and encourage residents to work together for the betterment of the community as a whole. There remains some divide between the two tenure groups within the Alliance that staff said they still work to address.

### III. Oakwood Shores

#### Overview of Redevelopment

The Chicago Housing Authority's (CHA) Plan for Transformation is the largest public housing revitalization effort in the United States. The changes that the CHA's transformation of its distressed public housing has wrought over the past decade have been dramatic and have changed the city's landscape markedly. Most striking is the absence of the massive high-rises that dominated the landscape in some of the city's poorest neighborhoods for half a century.<sup>6</sup>

The challenges the CHA faced in attempting to transform its public housing were enormous. The agency was one of the largest housing authorities in the country and had an extraordinary number of distressed units. Decades of failed federal policies, managerial incompetence, financial



New and future housing surrounding a park at Oakwood Shores

malfeasance, and basic neglect had left its developments in an advanced state of decay. Conditions inside the developments were appalling, with crime and violence overwhelming and gang dominance nearly absolute. The crack epidemic of the 1990s swept through CHA's developments, making conditions even worse for the residents and the problems more visible to outsiders.<sup>7</sup> By the early 1990s, CHA's high-rise public housing developments had become a national symbol of the failure of federal housing policy—and of antipoverty programs in general.

In the 1995, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) took over the housing authority. One of HUD's main goals was to reverse the CHA's image and show that it was possible to reclaim these profoundly distressed communities, the strategy that would eventually become the basis for CHA's Plan for Transformation. The centerpiece of this effort was the \$6 billion HOPE VI program, which provided financing for the demolition and replacement of hundreds of distressed developments across the nation.<sup>89</sup> The CHA became the largest recipient of HOPE VI funds, and the agency launched its first revitalization effort in late 1995. The full Plan for Transformation,

encompassing all of CHA's family developments, was initiated in 1999, when HUD returned the CHA to city control.<sup>10</sup>

Oakwood Shores is the largest of CHA's public housing redevelopment efforts. In 2000, the CHA received a \$35 million federal HOPE VI grant to support the redevelopment of three adjacent projects with more than 3,000 units on 94 acres of land. These public housing developments, Ida B. Wells Homes (1941), including the Wells Extension, Clarence Darrow Homes (1961), and Madden Park Homes (1970), were located just south of Chicago's central business district, the Loop, and near Lake Michigan. Public housing, like the city itself, was highly segregated by race and the population of the three developments was entirely African-American.

Like the rest of CHA's family housing, by the 1990s, the Wells/Madden community was physically deteriorated and overrun with drug trafficking and gang violence. In 1995, two young boys threw a five year old out of the window of a vacant unit in the Darrow Homes, a crime so horrifying that the CHA moved to quickly demolish the four high-rises. By 2000, the Wells/Madden community and surrounding areas were marked by extreme poverty, poor quality subsidized and privately owned housing, failing schools, and very high levels of crime. The toll on physical and mental health, educational attainment and future prospects was, for many residents, devastating (Popkin 2010).

As with its other properties, the CHA led the redevelopment effort for the Wells/Madden site, applying for and receiving the \$35 million HOPE VI grant and leveraging it with other public and private funding. The MacArthur Foundation also invested heavily in the community, making it one of its New Communities sites. While the CHA held meetings with residents and solicited input as to what the community would look like and what rules would be established to determine who could return, the effort was driven from the top.

Once redevelopment activities began, residents were relocated from the existing housing units to available units in other public housing developments or provided a Housing Choice Voucher with which they could search for and rent housing on the private market. Residents also could choose to leave on their own; the CHA evicted some households that were in violation of their lease. To return to the newly built housing, families had to apply for a unit and meet the selection criteria, which now included employment requirements, drug testing, a background check for felony convictions, and other factors. Original residents were not guaranteed a home in the new development.

The CHA is replacing Wells/Madden with Oakwood Shores, a mixed-income and mixed-tenure development that connects better to the broader community via a new street grid and park space. The original development area includes an additional 20 adjoining acres



that were considered blighted. Once completed, new development will have 3,000 housing units, divided roughly equally into public housing, affordable, and market-rate rental units and units for sale. Phase I includes 325 rental units, including approximately equal numbers of public housing, affordable and market-rate units, plus 124 homeownership units; these units were partially occupied at the time of the site visit. The portion of units targeted to any one income tier is meant to remain constant even as tenants come and go. In addition to the new housing, infrastructure and parks, there is a building which houses the leasing and management offices and provides community meeting space. In addition, there is a new elementary school that was constructed on the site in conjunction with the Wells/Madden redevelopment.

The Community Builders (TCB) is the lead developer and manager for Oakwood Shores. TCB is a national nonprofit urban housing developer with approximately 100 developments located across the country, including 15 HOPE VI sites. Granite Development Corporation, a Chicago-based company, is the developer of the for-sale units. The redevelopment was to have been lead by the McCormack Baron company (now McCormack, Baron, and Salazar) but the company and the Chicago Housing

Authority were unable to reach agreement on a contract. In 2002, Oakwood Boulevard Associates was selected as the master planner, of which TCB has remained the lead partner. In addition to Granite Development Corporation, the partnership includes Ujima, Inc.—a community-based social service organization.



Construction at Oakwood Shores, including green roofs

The housing built during the second phase of construction, including a new mid-rise building that was leasing units at the time of the visit, are “green.” The city

of Chicago is pushing developers to meet city goals to reduce energy consumption and lessen environmental impact in general. In response, TCB is building brick exteriors, which staff said is more expensive, installing green roofs (water and heat-absorbing plants), and putting in solar panels that heat water. In addition to the environmental impact, the green roofs and solar hot water serve to lower residents’ energy bills.

The majority of new residents in Oakwood Shores are African American. The racial diversity of the community has changed little since redevelopment, though diversity of

income is much greater now that the available housing includes market-rate rentals and for-sale units. Some former public housing residents have been able to purchase a home in Oakwood Shores. TCB staff told of 13 families that have taken advantage of a homebuying assistance program that covers a third of the mortgage cost for 15 years. Subsidized and nonsubsidized units as well as rental and for-sale units are integrated throughout the development. The multiunit buildings mix public and market rate units on each floor as well as for-sale and rental units in an effort to reduce any tendency for residents to interact only with similarly situated households.

Because of the economic downturn, it will take longer than originally expected to complete the redevelopment. At the time of the site visit, construction focused on rental units rather than for-sale homes and condominiums. TCB staff said that they still had many land parcels for such homes to be developed. Consequently, some occupied buildings in Oakwood Shores are next to construction zones or empty lots. The downturn also has affected the availability of funds for the development of additional community spaces. Leasing and sales of the market-rate units has slowed. Staff said that the moderately subsidized for-sale units were moving well, which helps the development's overall financial picture. The economy also has affected the availability of funds to develop additional community spaces.

According to TCB staff, there have been additional investments in the surrounding area since redevelopment began. Private developers are building high-end houses nearby, and staff hope that there will be a higher quality grocery store in the near future than what currently exists, along with other retail located within walking distance. At present, residents need to take public transit or drive to get to jobs and shopping options. Remaining challenges include the fact that many residents still face serious economic and social disadvantage. TCB staff involved in service delivery spoke about detached parents and children exhibiting serious health problems ranging from poor eyesight to hunger.

### **Emergent Issues**

The scope of change that is taking place in Oakwood Shores is leading not only to a change in management structure but to a complete overhaul of the physical environment and near total change in who resides in the community. In effect, Oakwood Shores is starting almost from scratch, which contrasts sharply with the approach to redevelopment in Castle Vale that has taken place with involvement of original residents who remain living in the community. However, even with these important differences, it is clear that many of the same issues affect both communities: changes in management and leadership, resident services, safety, and changing norms.

## Management & Community Leadership

A core challenge TCB staff face is that of managing a housing development not only diverse in terms of residents' income but also in terms of life experience; the new development houses extremely low-income public housing residents and higher-income, market rate tenants and owners. As a result, residents moving into Oakwood Shores have vastly different backgrounds and the challenge for staff is to figure out strategies to make the community work well for all. As one person

pointed out, it is easier to manage a site where the residents are similar in some way, such as an all-market rate or all-affordable rate housing development.



Oakwood Shores residents discussing their development with the research team

There are limits to who can live in Oakwood Shores. Though original public housing residents who opted for a temporary relocation when they left Wells/Madden can apply to return to Oakwood Shores, they are not guaranteed a unit in the new development. Staff are challenged to find a balance between leasing units to disadvantaged households who lived in the public housing developments and ensuring other residents are happy. As a staff member said, “not everybody can live here because not everyone will achieve.” “Putting ‘problem people’ here wouldn’t be fair to people who can follow rules.” Screening rules, mentioned previously, are meant to prevent people from moving in who might bring drugs or criminal activity into the development.

During the site visit, management staff spoke about efforts to improve their approach to managing the mixed-income development. TCB commissioned studies to identify areas for improvement, including hiring ethnographers to stay with families and provide feedback to staff on management shortcomings from residents' perspectives. Findings from this research indicated that TCB was not well connected to residents. Partly in response to the feedback, TCB recently had changed its management structure. The new approach, intended to improve relations with residents, moves away from a silo structure where staff only worked in their area of expertise, such as property management or community initiatives, to a more collaborative approach that encourages staff to work together to better address community and individual residents' needs.

Staff talked about race in relation to management challenges saying that how management staff respond to residents, most of whom are African American, is central

to setting the tone for inter-racial dynamics in Oakwood Shores. In an effort to avoid the reputation of staff from a nearby development, where residents perceive staff talk down to them, TCB staff said they try to treat residents as customers, regardless of race or income. The majority of staff from other departments had been African American until TCB recently hired more nonblack employees. This was done in an effort to present a vision of at least Oakwood Shores staff as diverse to support efforts to attract a more diverse resident base.

In addition to management challenges, TCB also is involved with early efforts to support community building and resident leadership. Staff hope to encourage residents to form a sense of community membership rather than ties along lines of income or tenure type, or length of time in the community. TCB has tried to create bridges by establishing committees that are open to anyone in the development, renters and owners. Staff also have shifted from holding large, community-wide meetings to discuss resident concerns to meetings organized by building. Because multiunit buildings house renters and owners, and families across the income spectrum, staff think these meetings help focus participants on shared issues. Staff said the meetings are now less likely “to devolve into grouse sessions.” One staff member talked about the organizing skills many public housing residents have saying the middle-income residents, who tend to be less organized, might be able to learn from their poorer neighbors. As residents develop skills in working together and effectively advocating for their needs in Oakwood Shore, TCB staff hope to lessen their involvement with the resident groups.

One of the redevelopment goals for Oakwood Shores was to enable integration of the development with the surrounding neighborhood, ending the isolation that marked the public housing developments. Staff and some residents talked about a first step in building community ties; residents from the broader area met to discuss what kind of neighborhood people want the area to be. The initial meeting led to the formation of the Bronzeville-Oakdale Neighborhood Association (BONA). The residents we met talked about the “painful” process of people getting to know each other and working through disparate goals and visions for what the area would be and who would lead. Particularly noted was the challenge of bridging long-term residents’ sense of entitlement and expectations of leadership with new residents’ sense that they are the future. Newer residents can tend to view those who have lived in the area for years as part of the neighborhood’s problems. BONA has been able to develop a long-term plan for the area that subsequently was approved by the Chicago City Council. According to one community leader, the plan calls for a return to the diversity the neighborhood once had by setting a goal around increasing the percent of new households that are white.

## Resident Services

The change in management structure to a more collaborative approach has minimized the division between property management and resident services staff. The new, close connection between these departments is based on the idea that it will lead to better resident outcomes and a reduction in management costs. In short, the management philosophy appears to be that supporting residents' efforts to increase their individual success will benefit the development venture as well. TCB said that funding is always a battle and they are always cobbling together resources to continue the level of management and services for residents staff believe is necessary.

Staff spoke about using a big stick and a big carrot with residents—they will provide high quality management and offer a range of supports to residents in recognition of the challenges many people face. They want to develop relationships with residents that extend beyond collecting rent without becoming social workers. Staff offered examples of management and resident service staff working together. If a tenant loses a job, but works with staff to find a new one, property management will offer leniency on the rent payment. Staff can also help tenants who are late with rent connect to job-related services or apply for unemployment insurance. These types of supports were described not as “social services but as resources [available to everyone] to help everyone get to baseline.” *Baseline* was the term used during a number of conversations to refer to the behavioral norms being established in the community, such as employment. A resource specialist is available to work with residents to identify any problems and connect people to services offered either on-site or off-site by partnering service providers.

Two key areas of resident support, in addition to employment assistance, are financial services and health care. Staff has found that the financial services are of interest to residents across income levels and tenure groups. An outside organization has offered workshops and individual counseling on financial management and planning. There are financial literacy programs targeted to youth as well. TCB staff hope the financial services will lead to a higher rate of employment among poor residents, higher income for people employed, and a reduction in the number of youth dropping out of high school. The health status of many lower-income residents is very poor, with people dealing with severe asthma, diabetes, and even post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). TCB is lobbying a local hospital to build a clinic within Oakwood Shores. Staff also have reached out to a clinic that serves people without a regular doctor, hoping that the medical staff will be able to work with residents in need.

It is clear that TCB staff do not view the mixed-income model alone as sufficient for developing successful communities where residents are self-sufficient and management is cost-effective. They see a strong need for resident services both to benefit residents

themselves and to increase the likelihood the property will be successful over time. Service provision is part of the management plan for the foreseeable future.

### **Safety**

Everyone we spoke with during the site visit talked about improvements in safety since the Wells/Madden public housing developments were demolished and the first phase of Oakwood Shores had been occupied. Staff, residents and police officers said the rate of crime, including violent crime, is much lower. Residents are less worried now that the public housing developments are gone and see Oakwood Shores as a good place to live, for the most part. People also talked about improved relations between community members and police, who now are credited for their positive engagement. However, problems remain that, if left unchecked, people fear could threaten the gains in safety. Management staff sees addressing safety and security concerns as part of their charge.

People with whom we met attributed the improved safety to who lives in the development and to police relations. Once prospective tenants pass the screening requirements and move into Oakwood Shores, those who are 18 and older must pass periodic drug tests to remain in the development. This rule applies to all residents, including market-rate tenants. According to staff, management was against instituting such a rule, but original residents on the committee to formulate residency requirements wanted it to avoid the severe drug problems that plagued the area before redevelopment. The drug tests are scheduled so that residents who use drugs have the chance to get clean. Management staff said they are willing to work with tenants who are making a concerted effort to get off drugs, but users who do not make an effort will be evicted for a failed test.

TCB staff said they work closely with the police, who know the troublemakers in the area. The police officers we interviewed talked about the importance of opening channels of communication, which depend upon a certain level of trust that was missing in the past with public housing residents. Now these residents are more inclined to report problems rather than withhold assistance. While acknowledging improvements, the police said building positive relationships is still a work in progress.

One effort police described was getting area churches more involved with youth. An officer visited each church in the community and convinced most of them to become a “safe



One of the parks in Oakwood Shores

haven.” Participating churches each sponsor an activity, such as choir, theater, or basketball. Youth from the area can attend any activity, which helps break down the geographic barriers and sense of territoriality among youth. The police show up at the activities and have found their presence increases participants’ sense of security, which encourages participation. Efforts such as this fit well with the Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy (CAPS) that involves increased police engagement with people and institutions.

While crime is down and police are more involved in positive ways compared to the past, the community still faces serious problems. Two issues mentioned by staff, police, and some residents involved problems in local parks and uninvolved parents. Residents described one of the two parks near the edge of Oakwood Shores as a dangerous place where shootings were frequent, though both area parks were said to be unsafe. There are many children in the development but few safe places to play so children are kept inside more than people would like, according to residents. Another reason cited for keeping children inside was concern that one’s child would be blamed for the actions of other children. The police officers talked about the lack of parental involvement in some children’s lives to a degree that the children are running around with no supervision and causing trouble. Lack of parental supervision is such a problem that police and TCB staff said they sometimes need to step in to play a parental role. The police officers with whom we met said there needs to be a community center that brings children and youth together from across the area, similar to the church-based activities, and positive activities for children of all ages. However, obtaining funding for such an effort is an ongoing challenge.

### **Place Identity and Cohesion**

Oakwood Shores is a young development, partially built and occupied but not yet near the end of construction. As building moves forward, TCB staff, community leaders and residents also are engaged in efforts to establish community norms through imposition of rules for behavior, development of community organizations, and discussions about neighborhood history. What struck us during the site visit were the discussions around what could be termed “place identity”—the use of history in efforts to frame the community today and efforts to establish community standards for behavior. These discussions were not focused solely on Oakwood Shores, but included the broader community of which it is a part. The tensions that interview respondents and discussion group participants identified among Oakwood Shores residents could be understood as alternative views on what history is relevant in understanding the community today and perhaps to establishing new community norms.

The vast majority of residents of Bronzeville, as the broader neighborhood is known, are African American. An influential community leader who met with us spoke of the “old and



stable character” of the area that was established in the mid- to late 19<sup>th</sup> century, when Chicago’s leading (white) businessmen and their families lived in Bronzeville; some of the old mansions are undergoing renovation today. Framing the area in such broad historical terms allowed the community leader, who is African American, to draw upon a notion of (positive) community standards that predate and are not limited to those associated with the public housing developments in later years. It is this older time that she, at least, puts forth as integral to the identity of Bronzeville and as the starting point for discussions of contemporary community norms.

This period, however, was marked by lease covenants that prevented African Americans and Asians from living in the neighborhood. Only racial minorities with domestic jobs could even enter white Bronzeville. The community leader explained that over time later owners of many mansions divided the houses into units for rent, which served as a work-around to the lease covenants, opening the neighborhood to racial minorities. She points to this period as one of greater racial diversity in the community, drawing on it as a precedent for contemporary efforts to increase diversity.

The subsequent period of Bronzeville she discussed was the time dominated by the public housing developments. As longer-term neighborhood residents aged, new younger residents, with “different standards” came to the area because of the developments and people associated with them. According to the community leader, the new standards that took root as the developments declined were outside the neighborhood’s historical norms; the public housing decades were, in this telling, an anomaly from Bronzeville’s history of being a healthy community.

While saying people do not “want to be stuck in yesterday,” the leader tells the neighborhood story in a way that offers elements from past history to draw upon when talking about actions now. The neighborhood history dovetails with staff efforts to determine behavior norms in Oakwood Shores. A staff member of TCB said, “now is the key time to establish the identity of the community. Now we have about 500 units and eventually there will be 3,000 units. We have to establish a baseline now to create the identity and norms for the community as it grows.” TCB staff talked about their hands-on approach with early efforts to establish “baseline norms” and to support integration of residents into a *community*. They want to steer people to function well as an integrated community before stepping back and letting things unfold. They view the leasing requirements and rules for the use of open and public space as ways to help integration happen by providing incentives for some residents to change their behavior to align with the new community norms. Staff also think the quality school located in Oakwood Shores will help over time as children from different backgrounds interact.

The history also provides an historical platform for TCB staff and the neighborhood association to market the development and the area in ways to attract a more racially



diverse resident base. While tensions are present to some degree between new and long-time community members, staff at Oakwood Shores and most BONA members have embraced the goal of creating a racially diverse community. While BONA developed a neighborhood plan that includes a goal to attract more nonminority households to the area, TCB staff are marketing the development in ways to reach a more diverse population.

#### IV. Conclusion

As we see through the two case studies, comparing the experiences of the two countries offers insight into comprehensive community revitalization efforts. Castle Vale and the Wells/Madden public housing communities that preceded Oakwood Shores experienced years of decline in both housing quality and neighborhood health. The communities were greatly affected by crime and had earned reputations within their respective cities as unsafe and undesirable places to live. The vast majority of families living in the communities were poor in income, education, and health. The goals of the redevelopment were similar in both countries: improve the housing stock and infrastructure, improve safety and security, increase resident economic and racial diversity, and increase the well-being of disadvantaged households.

Differences between the two communities are as stark as their similarities. Castle Vale is a majority white community located at the edge of Birmingham and existing as a nearly self-contained community. Redevelopment of Castle Vale was contingent upon resident approval, and all existing residents had the right to return to the new or renovated housing. Oakwood Shores, in contrast, is located in an African-American community located not far from the southern edge of Chicago's central business district. Original residents could participate in planning discussions on elements of the redevelopment, but did not have a final say about the nature of the redevelopment. All Wells/Madden residents had to relocate because of the redevelopment, and only those families that could pass screening requirements could exercise their right to return.

The transformation of the physical space in both communities has been significant. Castle Vale now has only two tower blocks, a reinvigorated town center, more park space, and other improvements. Oakwood Shores bears no resemblance to the public housing communities it replaced. Though the development is not fully built, new housing units, park space, and community facilities signal major change. The transformation of *community* in both places, however, is still a work in progress. An important challenge for both sites is how to foster a healthy community in an area that has been deeply troubled. As was clear in interviews and conversations in both places, there is no blueprint for staff or residents on how best to accomplish this goal.

In Oakwood Shores, the resident base has changed considerably. Not all former residents of the Madden/Wells developments want to or can return; consequently, current public housing residents are a mix of returning and new households. The majority of residents at the time of our visit were African American, as they were in the original developments, but there are now also higher-income households, renters, and homeowners living in the community. The resident base in Castle Vale has not changed to the same extent, because many residents were able to relocate on-site and all could return once units were ready for occupancy, even though not everyone did come back.

Also, a portion of the residents were homeowners and did not have to relocate. Nevertheless, there is a (slowly) growing number of BME households. There also is awareness that the city government supports increasing racial and ethnic diversity in Castle Vale to more closely reflect the city's diversity.

Changes in the racial and economic composition of the communities have led to some tensions among current residents. In Castle Vale, these tensions tend to center on racial differences, whereas economic class is the fault line in Oakwood Shores. Tensions between owners and renters and around community tenure are present in both communities.

A component of community transformation, as staff from both places commented, is establishing community norms. Staff and community leaders in both communities hope to promote personal motivation among disadvantaged households (to stay employed, do well in school, and so on) and ensure more controlled use of public space (increasing parental supervision of children, reducing antisocial behavior, and so on). The hope is that these changes also will help change the perception of the communities among the general public.

For the more disadvantaged residents in Castle Vale and Oakwood Shores, the new standards are meant to support personal and family well-being and integration into the economic mainstream. For all residents, these norms are meant to provide minimum expectations for acceptable behavior, reducing potential problems that could serve as flashpoints for residents. The theory is that if conflicts are minimized, then fostering social integration among neighbors will be possible.

The case studies offer other examples of community building and integration efforts, such as youth activities and programs, opportunities to participate in community leadership via board membership and involvement in community groups, and programs offered in conjunction with partners, such as community safety committees and youth sports.

Staff in both Castle Vale and Oakwood Shores were certain making gains in community building and integration was good not only for the residents but for the developments. The staff see the stakes as high. If residents living in the communities do not cohere and problems that stigmatized each place in the past return, the developments could decline again, making the investment in redevelopment a failure.

As more time passes for these redeveloped, mixed-income communities, it will be important to examine closely what fosters community cohesion. What factors best support efforts to address tensions and problems among residents? What practices seem best to foster integration among members of a diverse resident base? Until we

know whether and why mixed-income communities work within the new buildings and public spaces, we cannot know if these dramatic transformations truly succeeded.

From the case studies of Castle Vale and Oakwood Shores redevelopment initiatives, we draw these lessons relevant for redevelopment and community change initiatives:

- **Identify best practices for effective community building.**

Managers, service staff and community leaders agree that community building and community integration are important to the success of the redevelopments overall. Staff from Castle Vale and Oakwood Shores have altered their approaches to community building based on experience; other similar communities also have experiences worth exploring. It would be worthwhile to study and compile best practices that identify goals, implementation strategies, and funding sources so that community building can receive a level of attention that reflects its importance from policymakers and funding entities.

- **Support staff positions for youth programming within the development or the broader community.**

Stakeholders from both communities also discussed the importance of effective youth engagement to the maintenance of a peaceful community, development of future leaders, and the future self-sufficiency of youth. Castle Vale offers a model of youth programming with dedicated staff through on-site community centers. The challenge here is securing sufficient funding over time to allow for dedicated staff. Efforts to support funding streams for nearby community centers' staff and programming could reduce the need for a development to fundraise all or most of the resources needed for youth staff.

- **Larger forces can sidetrack community building efforts.**

The international economic downturn has affected the pace of construction, home sales, and leasing in Oakwood Shores, while in Castle Vale, there is concern that funding for programs and services will be difficult to sustain. In both sites, there were concerns about rising unemployment and the challenge of helping residents stay connected to the labor market—and able to afford their housing. Financial sustainability was not a focus of the site visits, though the topic came up in both communities. The case studies suggest that these new mixed-income communities are particularly vulnerable and need to ensure they have contingency plans and financial reserves to weather downturns.

---

---

## Notes

1. See: <http://www.englishpartnerships.co.uk/hats.htm>
2. In addition to the study visit to Castle Vale, the research team also visited and met with key stakeholders in the Birmingham communities of Aston, Sparkbrook, and Kingstanding.
3. In Chicago, the team also met with staff and residents at Dearborn Homes, a renovated public housing development, and toured Altgeld Gardens, Trumbull Gardens, Roosevelt Square, Westhaven, and the West End developments.
4. Worklessness refers to working-age adults who are not employed or enrolled in an educational or training program or actively seeking employment.
5. See C. McEwan, J. Pollard, and N. Henry, "The Non-'Global City' of Birmingham, UK: A Gateway through Time," in *Migrants to the Metropolis: The Rise of Immigrant Gateway Cities*, edited by M. Price and L. Benton-Short (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2008).
6. See S. Popkin, "A Glass Half-Empty? New Evidence from the HOPE VI Panel Study," *Housing Studies* 24(4):477-502.
7. See S. Popkin, V. Gwiasda, L. Olson, D. Rosenbaum, and L. Buron, *The Hidden War: Crime and the Tragedy of Public Housing in Chicago* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000).
8. HOPE VI stands for Housing Opportunities for People Everywhere. The program was enacted in 1992 under Section 24 of the U.S. Housing Act of 1937, Pub. L. No 74-412 Stat 888.
9. See S. Popkin, B. Katz, M. Cunningham, K. Brown, J. Gustafson, and M. Turner, *A Decade of HOPE VI: Research Findings and Policy Challenges*, Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, 2004
10. See S. Popkin, "No Simple Solutions: Housing CHA's Most Vulnerable Families," *Journal of Law and Social Policy*, 1(1).